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California Announces Statewide Crackdown on Texting and Handheld Cell Use

April is Distracted Driving Awareness Month – “It’s Not Worth It!”

Sacramento, CA – In an effort to eliminate dangerous behind-the-wheel cell phone use and texting, the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS), California Highway Patrol (CHP), and more than 200 law enforcement agencies across the state today announced high visibility enforcement operations during April’s National Distracted Driving Awareness Month. The overall goal of the increased enforcement is to convince drivers of the dangers of distracted driving and reduce the number of people impacted by this risky behavior. The “*It’s Not Worth It!*” theme emphasizes that a phone call or text isn’t worth a hefty fine or a collision.

“In a few short years, distracted driving has grown to be a nationwide traffic safety concern, and we all need to put forth the effort necessary to put an end to it,” said OTS Director Christopher J. Murphy. “Law enforcement agencies will be stepping up their efforts to help remind drivers to stay alert when behind the wheel and to not endanger their lives or the lives of others with distractions from mobile devices.”

In recent years, hundreds have been killed and thousands seriously injured in California as a result of collisions that involved at least one driver who was distracted. Nationally, an estimated 3,331 people died in 2011. Any activity that diverts the driver’s attention away from the primary task of driving is distracting, but the recent dramatic rise in cell phone talking and texting has greatly increased the number of collisions.

“No text message or phone call is worth the risk of serious injury—or much worse,” said Brian Kelly, Acting Secretary of the Business, Transportation & Housing Agency. “Always keep your eyes on the road and hands off your phone while driving.”

Behind the wheel, cell phone use can significantly reduce the brain functions needed for safe driving, sometimes up to 37 percent. The cell phone conversation can cause such a reduction in proper brain function that good drivers are transforming seemingly into inattentive “zombies” behind the wheel.

(more)

To avoid falling victim to “zombie-like” distracted driving behaviors OTS is providing drivers with the following tips that can be implemented by any motorist:

- Turn off your phone and/or put it out of reach while driving
- Include in your outgoing message that you can’t answer while you are driving
- Don’t call or text anyone at a time when you think they may be driving
- Adjust controls and set your song playlist before you set out on the road
- Stay alert and keep your mind on the task of driving- often after a long day at work or a not-so-restful night’s sleep, people’s minds can wander when behind the wheel. If you find yourself daydreaming - clear your head and focus on the road

In 2012, the California Department of Motor Vehicles reported nearly 450,000 handheld cell phone and texting convictions, with more than 57,000 tickets issued in April alone. The CHP and statewide law enforcement agencies are committed to ensuring our streets are safe by ticketing anyone found driving while distracted. The fine for a first time texting or hand-held cell phone violation is \$159, with subsequent tickets costing \$279.

"Enforcement is just one part of this campaign," said CHP Commissioner Joe Farrow. "The larger goal is educating motorists about the dangers of distracted driving and encouraging them to change their behavior behind the wheel. This effort is not about how many citations law enforcement officers can issue, but how many lives are ultimately saved because motorists made the right choice to focus their attention on the road, free of distraction."

Drivers and passengers alike are invited to check out all the Distracted Driving Zombies and add comments on the OTS Facebook page at www.facebook.com/CaliforniaOTS , and follow OTS on Twitter @OTS_CA. Get more distracted driving information at www.distraction.gov, www.ots.ca.gov, and teen information at www.impactteendrivers.org.

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